

Buddhist Divisions
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Historical Development of Buddhist Thought

The Buddha (Gautama) 563-480 B.C.

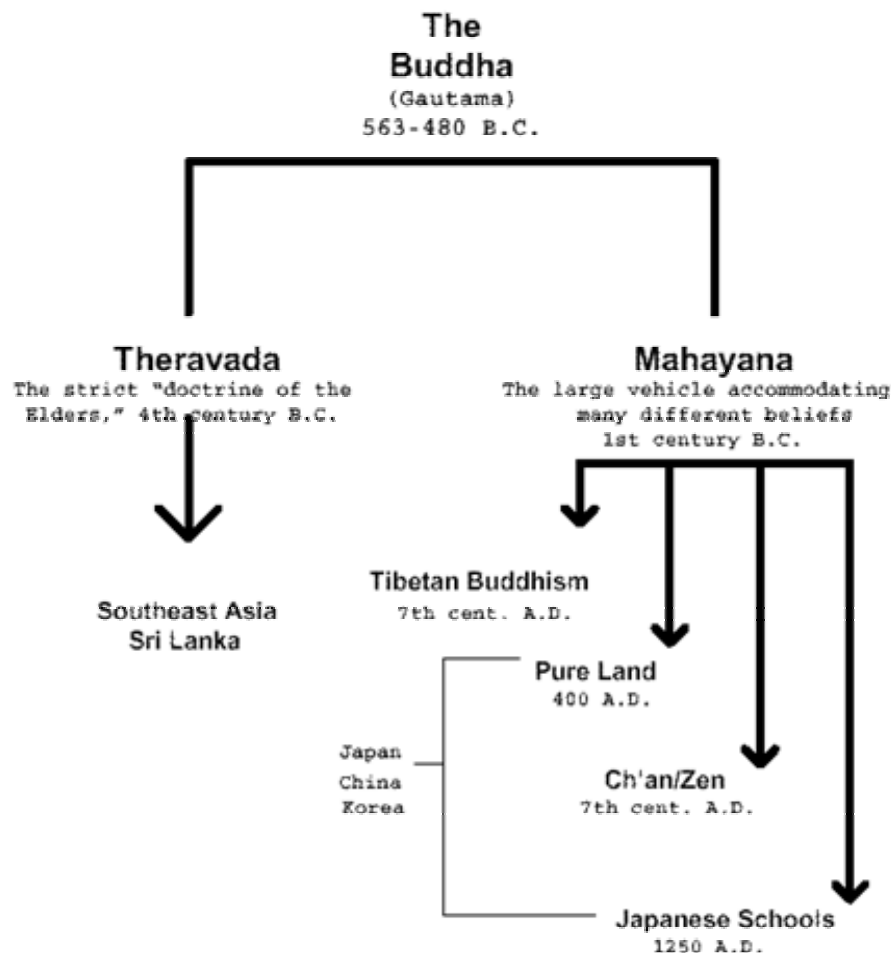
Theravada -- Began with the disciples of the historic Buddha

Mahayana --The strict "doctrine of the The Large Vehicle accommodating Elders," emerged in the 4th century B.C. and branched out into many different beliefs by the 1st century B.C. This form of Buddhism migrated to China in 1st century A.D.

Pure Land, 400 A.D. -- began in China and then migrated to Korea and Japan where it is a major form of Buddhist expression today

Tibetan Buddhism -- an Esoteric teaching that came to Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka in the 7th cent. A.D. directly from India

Ch'an/Zen -- Began early in China then developed in Korea in the 7th cent. A.D. and in Japanese Schools in 1250 A.D.



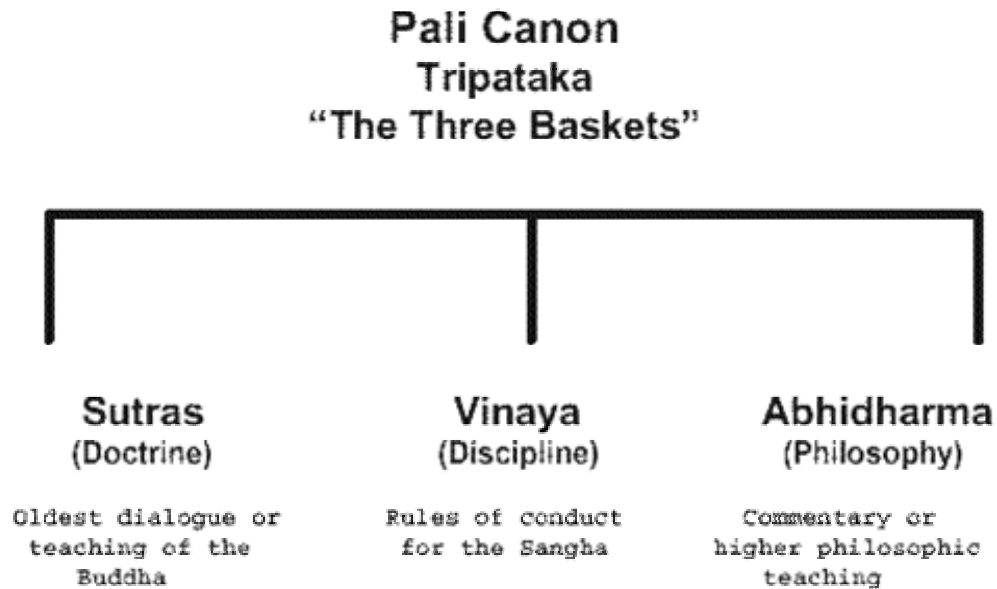
Adapted from Religions on File: Main Streams of Buddhism.

Theravada Buddhism

Theravada. Theravada practice centers on the original, basic Buddhist teachings. It provides the foundation--the groundwork and basis--for all other movements within Buddhism.

Theravada Texts. The **Pali** (pah-lee) canon, Tripataka is arranged into " **Three Baskets**" and is the source of early Buddhist thought. The Tripataka (Three Baskets) is composed of:

- (1) **Sutras** (SOO-trahs--discourses, scriptures)
- (2) **Vinaya** (VI-nuh-yuh, discipline for the Sangha) and
- (3) **Abhidharma** (uh-bee-DAHR-muh, commentary or philosophy.)



Nikayas (nee-KAH-yuh), texts which begin with '*Thus have I heard...*' are early sayings of Ananda, one of Buddha's disciples. They are the earliest forms of Buddhist scripture.

The Four Noble Truths. Four Holy or Noble Truths enable humankind to find peace with themselves and the world:

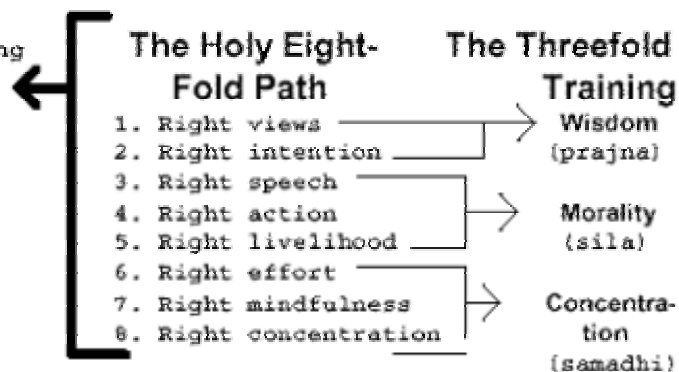
- 1) *"...that there is [suffering],*
- 2) *that its origin is [thirst, desire],*
- 3) *that men can bring about its cessation...through the attainment of Nirvan and*
- 4) *that the only way to achieve Nirvana is to follow the [Noble Eightfold Path]:*
 1. *Right Views, or acceptance of the Buddha's teaching;*
 2. *Right Thought, or aspirations leading to purity and charity;*
 3. *Right Speech;*
 4. *Right Conduct;*
 5. *Right Livelihood;*
 6. *Right Effort, or avoidance of lapses into frailty;*
 7. *Right Mindfulness, or constant awareness of the truth of the doctrine; 8. and*
 8. *Right Concentration, or spiritual exercise leading to an awakening."* (Lucien Stryk, World of the Buddha, p. xxxviii.)

Threefold Training. The Threefold Training classifies practices of the Noble Eightfold Path. Under:

- (1) **Wisdom** (Prajna, 'PRAHJ-nah) come Right Views and Right Thought (intention).
- (2) **Morality** (Sila), describes moral rules to purify and begin transformation of one's nature, increasing self-insight and mindfulness. Sila groups together Right Speech, Right Conduct and Right Livelihood.
- (3) **Concentration** (Samadhi, suh-MAH-dee), the cultivation of meditative calm and single-minded focus, categorizes Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

The Four Holy Truths

1. Of suffering
2. Of the source of suffering
3. Of the cessation of suffering
4. Of the path leading to the cessation of suffering



Adapted from Robinson and Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion*, p. 26.

Three Treasures. To avoid pain, adherents take refuge in the Three Treasures (Three Jewels),

- (1) the Buddha,
- (2) Dharma (the law, truth or doctrine), and
- (3) the Sangha.

"He who takes refuge with Buddha, the Law, and the Church [Sangha]; he who, with clear understanding, sees the four holy truths: pain, the origin of pain, the destruction of pain, and the eightfold holy way that leads to the quieting of pain; that is the safe refuge, that is the best refuge; having gone to that refuge, a man is delivered from all pain."

(The Dhammapada, in Lucien Stryk, *World of the Buddha*, p. 59.)

These foundational concepts--the Four Holy Truths, Threefold Training, and the Three Treasures--identify basic Theravada Buddhist practice.

"Buddha prepares the way.

He identifies the path.

He encourages all to follow, to attain Nirvana.

Enlightenment, although difficult to achieve, is open to all. "

Monks and nuns, however, as spiritual virtuosos, do have a decided advantage in making progress towards this awakening.

Mahayana Buddhism

Mahayana. Essential Theravada school teachings that are stated in the above section are the starting point for Mahayana development. What makes Mahayana Buddhism distinct from the Theravadan schools is the power packed notion embodied in Mahayana reinterpretations of Bodhisattvas (boh-dee-SAH-tah) which opens attainment of the Buddha path to everyone. Bodhisattvas are those who have experienced enlightenment (bodhi) but who have taken a special vow to continue being reborn into samsara (rather than entering nirvana) so as to deliver others from suffering by aiding in their attainment of enlightenment.

(See Robinson and Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion*, p. 237.)

Compassion and acting on behalf of others, exemplified by Bodhisattvas, acquired a renewed emphasis. All could aim for enlightenment, inspired by Bodhicittas (thoughts of enlightenment), which may result in a conversion-like experience.

Mahayana Schools. With the exception of Tibet and Mongolia the two major schools of thought within the Mahayana tradition are Pure Land and Zen (Ch'an).

Pure Land. Mahayana thought expresses itself in the broad Pure Land, Ch'an (Zen) and Tantra movements. **Pure Land is the most popular form of Buddhism in the world.** It identifies a goal for rebirth, the land of bliss (Pure Land or Western Paradise). Amitabha (ah-mee-TAH-bah) Buddha, as a Bodhisattva, created a paradise state. Entrance into this heavenly existence (Pure Land) is by means of Amitabha alone. As a result of invoking or chanting the namu amida butsu (praise and homage to Amitabha Buddha), practitioners attained rebirth in the land of bliss.

As identified in the True Pure Land practice of Japanese Buddhist, Shinran (shin-rahn, 1173-1262), the compassionate Amitabha Buddha became a savior figure, carrying awakened ones to the Pure Land. As recipients of Amitabha's grace, devotees express gratitude to him through means of ritualistic practice.

Zen. The Ch'an (chahn, Japanese Zen) school has not attained the popularity of Pure Land trends of thought though its current nominal fame in American/European/Australian culture betrays this fact. Building especially on the family/lineage aspect of traditional Chinese faith, Ch'an traces back to the Bodhidharma (boh-dee-DAHR-muh), a late fifth century patriarch who introduced Buddhism into China. Shen-hui (Shen-hway, 668-760), a monk who became the seventh patriarch, promoted the Ch'an school.

While never overlooking literary tradition, ritual, discipline, regimen, extreme intensity and concentration (more gradual practice), **Ch'an (Zen) nevertheless advocates a sudden, speedy, unmediated enlightenment.** The innate Buddha nature within every person allows everyone to have the potential to achieve this awakening.

Koans are part of the literary tradition of Ch'an. These public document sayings and dialogues of the masters, are short, pithy, apparently nonsensical verses. Yet, with study, rigorous application of logic, and awareness of both the duality involved and their question/answer format, interpretation--leading to enlightenment--can take place.

The following Koan is illustrative:

"Someone asked: 'In phenomena what is true? The Master said: 'The very phenomena are themselves truth.' 'Then how should it be revealed?' he asked. The Master lifted the tea tray."

(*The Buddhist Tradition in India, China and Japan*, ed. William Theodore De Bary, p. 233.)

Tibetan or Tantra Buddhism

While Tibetan Buddhism (sometimes referred to as Tantra Buddhism) falls under the umbrella of Mahayana Buddhism it is often spoken of and written about separately from other Mahayana schools because of its unique characteristics.

Tantra (THUN-truh). Tantra practice followed a direct route from India to Tibet, bypassing Chinese encumbrances. This explains, in part, its unique contribution to Buddhist thought. **Duality is central to understanding Tantra texts** (the word Tantra is taken from "taut thread" or "woof"), which are a network of teachings, incantations and **esoteric** sayings. The Vajrayana (vuhj-ruh-YAH-nuh) literature, contrasts masculine diamond/sword/thunderbolt images with feminine lotus flower depictions. Physical, philosophical, ironic, sexual, meditational and virtuous interpretations all can apply to tantras.

Unique practices of the Tantric movement include:

the necessity of a personal guru (*G00-roo*) to serve as a mentor,
liturgical meditation,

mantras (MAHN-truh, meditational devices serving as instruments of the mind),

and mahasiddhas (mah-hah-SI-dah, unconventional, enlightened, wandering about compassionate masters).

In addition, the most distinctive characteristic of Tantrism is that **rather than ridding self of desire (samudaya) through avoidance--tantrism advocates the use of the very troubling desire it desires to eliminate.**

"Just as water that has entered the ear may be removed by water and just as a thorn may be removed by a thorn, so those who know how, remove passion by means of passion itself."

--Cittavisuddhiprakarana vv 37-38, (as quoted in Buddhist Texts, ed. Edward Conze, p. 221.

Fundamentalism

Within parts of Southeast Asia, the Sangha (Buddhist monks and nuns, laymen and Laywomen) possessing the strength of numbers and respected by the laity, increasingly is called upon to exert political influence.

In Myanmar (Burma), frustration aroused by injustice led Buddhist monks to participate in leadership riots and underground revolutionary activity along the Myanmar-Thai border.

In Thailand and Cambodia, Buddhist activists have been instrumental in political activity since the early 1990's.

Political leaders in Cambodia and Laos, determining monastic orders (the Sangha) to be either reactionary or hindrances to development, steadily disestablished them during the past twenty years.

The revival of Buddhist influence in Singapore is indicative of resurgence Buddhism in growing economies.

"By the late 1980's, some Buddhist organizations were winning converts by following the Protestant churches in offering services, hymnbooks, and counseling in English and Mandarin. A Buddhist Society at the National University of Singapore offered lectures and social activities similar to those of the popular Christian Fellowship. Some Chinese secondary students chose Buddhism as their compulsory religious studies subject, regarding Confucianism as too distant and abstract and Bible study as too Western and too difficult. They then were likely to join Buddhist organizations, which offered congenial groups, use of English, and a link with Asian cultural traditions." (*Library of Congress Country/Area Study*)

In China, Buddhist expression serves to bind ethnic Tibetans together. Concern for the potential impact of ethnic separatist movements has led the Chinese government to restrict Tibetan Buddhist practice, including public expressions of reverence to the Dali Lama. Yet the very interest displayed by Communist officials in Tibetan Buddhism raises consciousness of its increasing impact.